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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, October 3, 1932

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "More about storing vegetables." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry and from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Today let's continue the talk we began a couple of weeks ago on storing our garden supplies for winter use. As we mentioned before, storing is the easiest, best and cheapest way to preserve many garden vegetables, provided you have the proper storage place and the right vegetables to store. Generally the root vegetables will keep well in storage. Very juicy vegetables like tomatoes or cucumbers or green leafy vegetables like spinach need to be preserved by such other methods as canning, pickling or drying.

But whether you store your vegetables in a cellar, a storage building outside or an outdoor storage pit, you need to know the right conditions to keep the different kinds of vegetables best. Some of them need a warm place to keep healthy while others require a cold temperature.

That reminds me of a little verse written by the garden specialist at the New York State College of Agriculture. Maybe you've heard it. It will help you remember some of the principles of storage when you start to put away your own products this fall.

"For storage crops, each has its rule,
And there are lots of reasons why:
Beets and spuds keep moist and cool,
But pumpkins must be warm and dry."

Specialists on storage say that storage, like canning and drying, is only successful if you use good quality vegetables. The best storage in the world won't make culls anything else but culls. Good quality means vegetables that are well-grown yet are neither old nor tough. And look out for imperfections like cuts, bruises and insect damage. No use putting away such imperfect vegetables, but use them immediately, for they are likely to decay and that may cause you to lose the whole lot of vegetables.

If you have the proper temperature and the right degree of moisture in the air, you can keep good vegetables good a long time in storage. But remember to start with good products, to handle them carefully and store them under the right conditions.

In general, these are the rules for storing. Root and leaf crops like beets, carrots, parsnips, salsify, turnips, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and celery need a cool and humid place to keep in good condition. The temperature for these vegetables ought to be from 31 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the relative humidity above 90 per cent.

Onions and dry beans need a cool but dry, well ventilated place.

But the vegetables like squashes, pumpkins and sweet potatoes need to be both warm and dry. Maybe you remember that we spoke of giving sweet potatoes a curing period of two or three weeks after harvesting to help them keep well in storage. After-ripening or curing as some people call it, is simply keeping the sweet potatoes in a dry and very warm, well ventilated room for a while until they develop a tough skin to resist the loss of water and the molds and rots. Once cured, put the sweet potatoes in a cooler room, at about 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Use this same method of curing and storing squashes and pumpkins.

Though squashes and pumpkins will keep for winter use in the storage room in the basement or in any dry, well-ventilated cellar, a dry frost-proof space above ground is best for them. Set them in rows on shelves so they won't come in contact with each other. If the temperature keeps at about 50 or 55 degrees Fahrenheit the late maturing varieties of these vegetables will keep until late in the winter.

Now let's answer a few storage questions.

First, what is the best way to keep beans and peas for winter use?

Answer. Pick the bean pods as soon as they mature and spread them in a warm, dry place, like the attic floor, until the beans inside are thoroughly dry. Then shell and store the beans in loose-woven bags hung in a dry, well-ventilated place until you need them. Navy or other bush beans can mature on the vines until most of the pods are ripe. Then pull the whole plant and mature it like hay. After thoroughly drying, thresh the beans and store them in bags.

You can treat peas just as you do these bush beans.

Do turnips have to freeze in the ground before they are fit to eat?

No, that's an old superstition about turnips. I don't know where it started. The specialists say that turnips will withstand hard frost, but alternate freezing and thawing injures them and makes them spongy. So don't leave them in the ground all winter in the northern sections. Gather them, take off the tops, and store them in banks or pits or in an outdoor storage cellar.

I mention outside spaces because turnips are some of those vegetables that you can't well store in the cellar of your house. Stored turnips give off odors that will penetrate all through the house.

One more question. This is about putting away apples for the winter. Apples keep best at a temperature just above freezing. You can store them in the basement or in outdoor cellars or storage pits. If you keep them in the cellar, put them in barrels, boxes, crates or bins and see that Jack Frost doesn't get at them. If you have a good many apples to store, you might put part of the crop in the cellar and the late-keeping varieties that you'll be using toward spring might go out in some of your outdoor pits.

That's all about storing vegetables unless you write me more questions.

Just now let's consider our menu today--a Monday economy dinner planned for these cool snappy fall days. Pork chops served with pepper relish; Mashed potatoes and gravy; Buttered spinach; and that good, old-fashioned fall dessert--Baked apples and Gingerbread.

Speaking of spinach on that menu reminds me of a letter a young housekeeper wrote me not long ago.

"Dear Aunt Sammy," said the letter. "I've made up my mind that people dislike spinach for just two reasons--either because it isn't carefully washed and cleaned, or because it isn't properly cooked."

A very wise young housekeeper, I said to myself when I read that. Grit left on the leaves or poor cooking certainly does ruin that good vegetable, spinach.

Then the letter continued: "So, if you please, I'd like some complete directions for fixing spinach so that it will look attractive when it comes on the table and so it will also taste delicious. I want to know how to cook it so that it will keep its nice green color and its fresh flavor."

Here's how. First, carefully pick over the spinach and discard the old wilted or imperfect leaves and cut off the stem ends. Then wash the spinach in several waters to remove the grit. If you lift the leaves carefully from the panful of water, the sand will sink to the bottom. Do this two or three times until the water is clear.

If your spinach is young and tender, you won't need to add any water for cooking. Just cook it in the water that clings to the leaves. Start cooking at moderate heat and cover the kettle at first. Turn the spinach now and then until it is thoroughly wilted; then remove the cover and stir frequently. Two pounds of spinach will need to cook this way for only from ten to fifteen minutes. Then, chop the spinach fine, season it with pepper, salt and butter or other fat, and serve it.

What if you are using spinach that is a little past the young and tender stage? In that case, cook it in a small quantity of water for about twenty minutes, then drain it, chop it and season it with salt, pepper and butter.

Maybe you'd like to vary the flavor a bit. If you would, brown a small amount of finely cut onion in fat and then add it to the spinach for seasoning. Or season with vinegar and bits of crisp fried salt pork or bacon. Or serve the spinach with olive oil instead of butter with sections of lemon for a garnish. Sliced or chopped hard-cooked egg always makes an attractive garnish for cooked spinach.

Another very good way to fix spinach is with cream. Some other day I'll tell you about that. Or, if you own a green cookbook, you can find the recipe for yourself. It's on page 59.

Tomorrow, I'm going to tell you some true stories about how homemakers in various parts of the country have been making money at home.

